

Message Text

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44

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 ACDA-05

SAJ-01 OMB-01 IO-10 /086 W

----- 120985

O P 061239Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7342

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USMISSION NATO

USMISSION USUN

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GERMANY PRIORITY

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON PRIORITY

FOSIF ROTA PRIORITY

COMSIXTHFLT PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 0051

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PBOR MO SS SP MR AG UR

REF: RABAT 0039 (NOTAL)

1. BOTH SEMI-OFFICIAL AND OPPOSITION PRESS CARRIED STORIES JAN 6
ON SEIZURE OF 200 FT. SOVIET REFRIGERATED TRAWLER, THE SAPFIR, HULL
NUMBER K-0353. NEWS REPORTS OF DETAILS DIFFER SOMEWHAT, WITH
SEIZURE VARIOUSLY REPORTED TO HAVE OCCURED (A) OFF THE COAST OF
SAHARAN CITY OF VILLA CISNEROS; (B) OFF SOUTHERN MOROCCAN COAST;
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BETWEEN AGADIR AND TARFAYA; (C) LAST WEEK; (D) MORNING

JAN. 5. ISTIQLAL AL ALAM REPORTED TRAWLER WAS IN "MOROCCAN TERRITORIAL WATERS", BUT DISTANCES WERE NOT GIVEN. AL ALAM WROTE THAT SHIP WAS NOW IN AGADIR, THAT ITS CARGO HAD BEEN UNLOADED JAN. 3, AND THAT A NUMBER OF THE PASSENGERS, "WHO EXCEEDED 40 SAILORS", HAD BEEN ARRESTED. SEMI-OFFICIAL LE MATIN CITED AP REPORT ALLEGING THAT THREE ALGERIAN OFFICERS WERE ABOARD.

2. AMBASSADOR QUERIED FOREIGN MINISTER LARAKI EVENING JAN. 5 ABOUT REPORTED INCIDENT. LARAKI SAID HE HAD FIRST HEARD ABOUT IT EARLIER SAME EVENING WHEN SOVIET COMMERCIAL ATTACHE HAD "INFORMED" FOREIGN MINISTRY ABOUT THE SEIZURE. HE EMPHASIZED THAT THE SOVIETS HAD NOT LODGED A PROTEST. E COMMENTED SOVIETS MUST KNOW THEY WERE IN WRONG, BECAUSE THEY USUALLY COMPLAINED VOCIFEROUSLY AT SLIGHTEST PROVOCATION. HE PROFESSED NOT TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT WAS ON BOARD SOVIET VESSEL, OR WHETHER ANY ALGERIANS HAD BEEN APPREHENDED. SPANISH EMBASSY OFFICIAL ALSO PRESENT EXPRESSED PRIVATE CONCERN OVER REPORTED LOCATION OF SEIZURE OFF VILLA CISNEROS, INASMUCH AS TERRITORIAL WATERS OFF SAHARA COAST REMAINED THEORETICALLY UNDER SPANISH JURISDICTION.

3. MFA DIRECTOR OF EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN AFFAIRS BELKORA TOLD DCM JAN. 6 THAT SHIP HAD BEEN SEIZED IN MOROCCAN TERRITORIAL WATERS, ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT SPECIFY LOCATION. BELKORA SAID SOVIET CAPTAIN HAD REFUSED TO BE INSPECTED AND GOM SO FAR RELUCTANT TO USE FORCE. GOM, HE CONTINUED, IGNORANT OF WHO ON BOARD OR NATURE OF CARGO. BELKORA OPINED THAT THE MATTER COULD TAKE SOME TIME TO RESOLVE, HINTING THAT GOM MAY DECIDE TO LET SHIP'S FOOD AND WATER RUN LOW. SPEAKING IN GENERAL TERMS, BELKORA SAID GOM WORRIED ABOUT SOVIET INTENTIONS IN AFRICA AND COMMENTED THAT US "WEAKNESS" ON ANGOLA COULD ENCOURAGE SOVIET ADVENTURISM ELSEWHERE.

4. COMMENT: FOREIGN MINISTRY SO FAR MINIMIZING INCIDENT. LARAKI'S COMMENTS WOULD ALSO SEEM TO SHOW LACK OF COORDINATION -- AND PROBABLY TRANSFER OF INFORMATION -- BETWEEN MOROCCAN MILITARY AUTHORITIES AND MFA. INCIDENT REFLECTS OBVIOUS HIGH DEGREE OF MOROCCAN FENSITIVITY OVER POSSIBLE REINFORCEMENT OF SAHARAN GUERRILLAS FROM THE CONFIDENTIAL

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SEA, AFTER LA GUERA INCIDENT (RABAT 6102) IN WHICH POLISARIO REPORTEDLY RE-SUPPLIED BY SHIPS VARIOUSLY RUMORED TO HAVE BEEN ALGERIAN OR SOVIET.

5. SOVIET EMBASSY TREATMENT SEEMS VERY LOW-KEY AS WELL FOR MOMENT, BUT REPORT OF SOVIET CRUISER HEADING AT HIGH SPEED FOR AREA (CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON 051706Z JAN 6 NOTAL) INDICATES SOVIETS TAKING NORMAL CONTINGENCY STEPS TO KEEP

OPTIONS OPEN.

6. DESPITE APPARENT RESTRAINED ATTITUDE OF BOTH
MOROCCANS AND SOVIETS THUS FAR, THIS AFFAIR CLEARLY HAS HIGH
DISRUPTIVE POTENTIAL FOR BILATERAL RELATIONS. WE HAVE BEEN
GETTING PERSISTENT STRONG SIGNALS OF GOM'S CONCERN OVER
SOVIET SUPPORT FOR ALGERIA IN SAHARA DISPUTE. IF
SOVIETS HAVE NOW ACTUALLY BEEN CAUGHT IN ACT OF TRANSPORTING
ARMS AND ALGERIAN PERSONNEL TO BOLSTER SAHARAN INSURGENTS,
KING WILL BE FACED WITH DELICATE DECISION IN CHOOSING
DEGREE OF PRESSURE AND DISPLEASURE BEST SUITED TO DISCOURAGING
DIRECT SOVIET INVOLVEMENT IN SAHARA.
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Message Attributes

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